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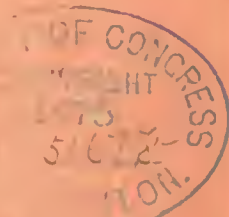
A
CENTENNIAL POEM

BY

JAMES P. ALLEN.

READ BEFORE THE RED BANK LITERARY ASSOCIATION, IN
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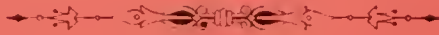
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J. P. A.

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CENTENNIAL POEM.

The hand of Time, points to a century gone;
One hundred years have filed their march along—
Bearing their joys and gladness, their sighs and tears,
Through blood, carnage, and soul quaking fears:
Yet, how gloriously Time revolved the decades,
From our country's birth to her centennial age!
But, oh, how fraught with weal and with woe,
Did each of these years come—do their work and go.
By the clear, bright light of history's page,
We behold the work of our fathers' age;
And to it we speed from our point of time,
There, to imbibe its principles divine.

From the threshold of the century that's gone,
We look down the vista to that which is come;
And note the events as they rise to our view,
With lessons of wisdom for me—for you.
By the mystic touch of the Muse's wand,
The departed return and inhabit the land;
And we, with them, will live through the years,
That established a nation in blood and tears.
So, we now call our guide, from yon spirit world,
Who comes to show us the things we have heard,
Of these, who lived in the ages gone by,
And for their country dared even to die.

He takes us up to the cold gray peaks
 That kiss the clouds, and thus he speaks:
 "Look over the land and there behold
 The scenes that I shall now unfold.
 From those grand old rocks that rise so high,
 As their cliffs point upward to the sky;
 From the roaring waves that dash their base,
 To the everlasting hills in place—
 Swells Nature's Te Deums loud and deep,
 For the Pilgrim Fathers there who sleep.
 These are the monuments which she did raise,
 Sacred to them, for honor and praise.

'Tis ages since when this little band
 Fled the oppression of their native land;
 And 'mid perils, dangers and hardships untold,
 Founded Liberty's temple which you now behold.
 You may think they had no combats and woes;
 But look at the work of the red savage foes!
 See them creeping along with hatchet and knife
 And soon will begin their cold-blooded strife.
 Ah! look at the red lurid glare in the west:
 It betokens the death of those loved best;
 It is homesteads aflaming; it is families in death,
 By the fiends of the forest with blood on their breath.

They have entered in stealth while the men were away,
 Holding the foreign invader at bay.
 And when they return to their once happy homes,
 The welcome is given by ashes and bones.
 Behold the white smoke as it curls from yon plain!
 Floats o'er the dark wood that skirts the blue main;
 Hear the cannons loud boom, the muskets sharp crash;
 The clanging of arms—see the sword's bright flash;
 Hear the groans of the wounded, the shrieks of the dying;
 See! the ground is strewn with dead that are lying,
 As they fell in the charge by the bayonet's pierce,
 While they struggled in combat both deadly and fierce.

'Tis the conflict 'twixt freemen and liberty's foes;
 The issue of which, through the ages shall flow,
 With rich blessings of freedom to all mankind;
 Or the fetters be strengthened wherewith to bind.
 Look away beyond upon the ocean deep,
 Where its waters with heaven's dome doth meet;
 See the fleecy clouds of canvass that bear
 Proud Britain's stately ships of war.
 They are speeding on to the colonial shores,
 With cannons and men and munitions of war,
 To enforce the decrees of an autocrat king,
 Which debases their manhood and makes it a "thing."

Americans! you who fill the tenth decade,
 Hear with holy awe the vow your sires made;
 Caught by heaven's breeze, wafted the world around,
 Filling the universe with cheering sound:
 'We swear by the name of our Creator and Lord,
 Whose image we bear, and live by his word,
 Our honors sacred, fortunes and lives,
 All solemnly pledge to the Liberty that cries—
 For relief of humanity which is now made to feel,
 The despotic force of the tyrant's heel,
 That grinds to dust those heaven born rights,
 Which raised the race to freedom's heights.'

Ah, hear ye now the sound of the bell,
 As it rolls o'er the mountain and down in the dell,
 And upward and onward to the furthest shore,
 Pealing forth Liberty forever more.
 See Nature, her beauty and power lend,
 To swell the chorals with loud Amen,
 To that proclamation, which has by time,
 Proved its source from the hand Divine.
 In the council chambers of the Keystone State,
 Convened are America's sons, the wise and great:
 Who, with trust in God, proclaim to the world abroad,
 A nation freed from the monarch's rod.

As the sound of that grand old bell rolls on,
 You hear the response of fife and drum.
 'Tis the call to arms—see in battle array!
 The patriots are marching in phalanx away.
 They've come from the bench, the forge and the plow;
 They've come with a purpose and firmness now;
 They have come in the strength and vigor of health,
 With this watchword—"Give us Liberty or Death!"
 See! the conflict is opened, the strife is begun;
 It will be long weary years before it is done.
 The battles are raging on land and on sea;
 How portent this hour, my country, for thee!

The wail of the widow and orphan is heard,
 For their loved ones who've fallen by bullet and sword.
 The mantle of mourning envelopes the land;
 It seems as if God had withdrawn his hand.
 Though his ways are unsearchable, his purpose unknown,
 Yet, in wisdom and glory, God's works are all shown.
 Their trust is in Him for country and all;
 In His omnipotent arms their cause cannot fall.
 Hear their prayers ascend to God's throne for power,
 In this, America's despondent hour!
 Their souls are prostrate in agony,
 Imploring for succor; for Liberty!

Those prayers are answered. Look! o'er the distant sea,
 Light is beaming to cheer them on the way.
 'Tis France, who, in this dark and trembling hour,
 Sends forth her sympathy, aid and power.
 Ah, sons and daughters of that sunny clime,
 In this nation's heart thou art enshrined;
 And Lafayette's name shall emblazon forth
 Where'er the eagle pursues his course.
 The dark cloud of war is rapidly lifting;
 The hordes of the tyrant are swift retreating,
 As they're pressed to the shores by patriot bands;
 See! they embark and flee from America's lands.

Look! the battles are o'er, and the strife is done;
 Our cause is gained, and liberty's won.
 See! the angel of peace now hovers the land,
 Scattering her blessings on every hand.
 See hamlets, towns and cities arise,
 While the hum of their industry mounts to the skies.
 Liberty's banner to the breeze unfurled,
 Beckons to a down-trod, shackled world.
 The crimson red and snowy white,
 Pinned with the stars that shone so bright,
 To heaven's blue—are emblems for the world oppressed,
 To seek its folds and here find rest.

See far upon the Atlantic's main,
 Those clouds of canvass rise again.
 What means it? 'tis ships bearing o'er,
 Precious souls to these western shores.
 They come not now in strife and war;
 They come to escape the monarch's power;
 They come from every land and every clime
 Upon which the eternal sun doth shine;
 They seek a refuge in the land of the free,
 To drink of the fountain of liberty;
 They come for the greatest gift of the land;
 'Tis the full, free rights of every man.

They have seen the starry flag unfold,
 America's freedom with power to hold.
 They are coming now to possess the land,
 And extend her borders to the golden sand.
 Behold their work! the foundry, the loom.
 See the prairies now, like an Eden bloom!
 The hills, from out their bosoms flow,
 Great streams of wealth to the land below.
 See her oceans, lakes and rivers teeming
 With vehicles of commerce steaming
 In their transit—rich in stores—
 Bearing on to other shores.

The arching span, leaps valley and dale,
 The mountain's gorge, for the iron rail;
 The lightning's flash 'long ocean's bed,
 The distant west to the east is wed.
 The towering spire and college dome,
 Point up from whence all these have come;
 The church and school their wisdom give
 For common good, that all might live;
 And as their light with brilliant ray
 Dispels the darkness—brings the day—
 The living word of the Eternal God,
 Is spread through heathen lands abroad.

I felt with awe the Omniscient power
 That brought the Nation to the present hour.
 In all this grandeur of rapid advancement,
 My mind's vision peered for the country's fulfillment
 Of her mission. When turning with saddened mien,
 The guide spoke: "In all these sights you've seen
 The glory of God for the good of the race;
 Yet from the beginning, His creature is debased,
 And soon He will lay His chastening rod
 Upon the nation to prove He is God;
 And the earth will quake 'neath the tread of men,
 Hastening on to the battle's din.

This is the decree from the throne above,
 To earth and all nations thereof:
 'Woe unto the world if ye bring offence
 To the image of God established thence.
 We've peopled the earth various in race and color;
 But all in the likeness of their Creator.'
 And America, We have chosen thee,
 A refuge for the oppressed, "a home for the free;"
 Bestowed rich blessings for thy delight,
 To raise thee as a beacon light.
 But thou hast fostered the monster offence;
 Our sword is now drawn to drive him hence.

Two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil,
 Shall now be repaid in blood and spoil.
 The wail of anguish from desolate homes;
 The widowed hearts, the orphans' groans,
 The waste of treasure, blood and life,
 Shall mark my justice in the strife.
 And this, my purifying stroke shall be,
 To make thee truly the land of liberty;
 And then on thy course my mission to fill,
 We'll be with thee, to guard from ill;
 For thy end reaches to eternity's shore,
 Where the angel swears, 'time is no more.' "

The guide ceased speaking; his work was done;
 He vanished from sight toward the setting sun.
 But the scenes he unfolded, the words that he spoke,
 Thrilled my being with fear; and my soul did quake,
 As alone with my God, 'mid these ragged peaks,
 I was taught those truths, of which his word speaks:
 "I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt worship me,
 And love my image where'er that stamp you see."
 And as the years have run their course and gone,
 Our nation, purified, moves in her destiny on
 To grander achievements, and a nobler end,
 Upon which the hopes of unborn millions depend.

And there beyond in the Keystone State
 Stands the Centennial monument grand and great,
 Where all the nations under the sun
 May show the works which they have done,
 In science, art and mechanical skill;
 By the fruits of their labor prove which will
 Advance humanity to the highest degree,
 Monarchs' sway or rule of Liberty;
 And here Columbia her treasures bring,
 While land and sea, and the mountains ring
 Loud anthems of praise to Him who rolled
 The years of Freedom, one hundred told.

And then, as this monument in remembrance stands,
Brought forth from the earth by freemen's hands,
As a tribute of honor to the patriot dead,
Whose blood flowed for the land we tread;
Yet, we as Americans, have forged in our hearts,
That golden link which never parts;
By it we are bound to those spirits above,
Who languished and travailed for the cause they loved
When on earth; so we with inspiration given,
With strength and wisdom from the throne in heaven,
Will press on the work our sires began,
As led and governed by our Father's hand.

And now, as I've scanned in a moments glance,
From our country's birth to her present advance;
This centennial offering, I bring to thee,
Tis America—our country—happy and free.

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